



September 15, 2000

Ms. Janice Mullenix
Associate General Counsel
Texas Department of Transportation
125 E. 11th Street
Austin, Texas 78701-2483

OR2000-3562

Dear Ms. Mullenix:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID#140384 .

The Texas Department of Transportation (the "department") received a request for various documents related to DDS Aggregates, Inc. and related entities. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.128 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.¹

Section 552.128 of the Government Code protects the interests of historically underutilized and disadvantaged businesses. Section 552.128 provides:

(a) Information submitted by a potential vendor or contractor to a governmental body in connection with an application for certification as a historically underutilized or disadvantaged business under a local, state, or federal certification program is excepted from [required public disclosure], except as provided by this section.

(b) Notwithstanding Section 552.007 and except as provided by Subsection (c), the information may be disclosed only:

(1) to a state or local governmental entity in this state, and the state or local governmental entity may use the information only:

¹We note that the request appears to encompass information that you have not submitted to this office. We therefore assume that you have either released this information to the requestor, or that it does not exist.

(A) for purposes related to verifying an applicant's status as a historically underutilized or disadvantaged business; or

(B) for the purpose of conducting a study of a public purchasing program established under state law for historically underutilized or disadvantaged businesses; or

(2) with the express written permission of the applicant or the applicant's agent.

(c) Information submitted by a vendor or contractor or a potential vendor or contractor to a governmental body in connection with a specific proposed contractual relationship, a specific contract, or an application to be placed on a bidders list, including information that may also have been submitted in connection with an application for certification as a historically underutilized or disadvantaged business, is subject to required disclosure, excepted from required disclosure, or confidential in accordance with other law.

You assert that "all the requested information was submitted to TxDOT in connection with an application for certification as a DBE." You further state that the requestor is not a governmental entity and that the department does not have express written permission from the applicant to release the information, nor was the requested information submitted in connection with a specific bid or bidder's list. Therefore, we conclude that the requested information consisting of documents submitted by DDS Aggregates, Inc. to the department is made confidential under section 552.128 and must not be released.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov't Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the

statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body's intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at 877/673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Department of Public Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.--Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to the General Services Commission at 512/475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,



Michael A. Pearle
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

MAP/ljp

Ref: ID# 140384

Encl. Submitted documents

cc: Mr. Tim Tesch
820 Castle Ridge Road
Austin, Texas 78746
(w/o enclosures)